

Rocky Withdrawal

104.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
Thursday, March 21, 1968

Statement By  
Governor Nelson A. Rockefeller

I have decided today to reiterate unequivocally that I am not a candidate campaigning, directly or indirectly, for the Presidency of the United States.

There arises for me a political and a personal obligation to explain briefly the reasons for my decision. I can best state these reasons as answers to three obvious and fair questions.

One: why have I delayed this particular statement till this moment? Two: what are the essential causes for my decision? And three: what political course do I intend to pursue in the months ahead?

As for the first question....

I have had to weigh my decision, gravely and thoughtfully, because of the very nature of the Presidency and the very force of the appeals made to me to seek it. I believe I well understand the office of the Presidency and its unique place in our life as a people. No political leader in our national life should dread

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or shun it. No such leader should be too proud -- or too fearful of personal risk or sacrifice -- to seek it. Its burdens, huge though they are, do not awe me -- only its honor.

At the same time, I have spent the last weeks talking with concerned citizens and Republican officials, from coast to coast, who have urged me to wage the most vigorous contest to win this office. I have also been deeply moved by the activity of volunteer groups throughout the country, as well as the Republican workers in Oregon who amassed more than 50,000 signatures on their petitions to me. And so I might have shown less than enough respect for the honor of the Presidency, as well as for the counsel of many citizens, had I not weighed the matter with all mind and all conscience, before reaching a firm decision.

As for the second question -- the reasons for this decision -- I would summarize them as follows ....

One. By the nature of our political processes, we must operate through, not outside, our great political parties. Ideally, the Presidential candidate of each of our two major parties should reflect as broadly as possible the will and the spirit of each party and its leadership across the country. By this criterion, I could not truthfully claim such a Republican following today.

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Quite frankly, I find it clear at this time that a considerable majority of the party's leaders want the candidacy of former Vice President Richard Nixon. And it appears equally clear that they are keenly concerned and anxious to avoid any such divisive challenge within the party as marked the 1964 campaign. It would therefore be illogical and unreasonable for me to try to arouse their support by pursuing the course of action they would least want and most deplore.

Two. As a nation, we are passing through a time of crisis and confusion probably without parallel in our history. Under the siege of a grim host of problems -- from the tragic war in Asia to the shocking decay of our cities -- we have become a people distracted and divided. And at precisely this time, the Democratic Party itself -- while in control of both the Executive and Legislative Branches -- threatens to be torn asunder.

How should a responsible Republicanism act in a period of such crisis? I cannot believe that the Republican retort to the Democratic scene should be: any din you can raise, we can raise higher. I honor the right of open dissent and the rigor

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of honest debate as vital marks of democratic life. I have been known to take pride in combat for political principles. But I do not believe that the way to compose perilous national division is to create more partisan division. For the Republican Party, this is particularly true, for it is -- even in full unity-- a minority party. Its deep discordance could mean only its sure impotence. The serious service of the nation demands that this party dedicate all its strength to the constructive and the creative. This means: the study of national issues, the design of imaginative programs, and the quest of meaningful unity.

Three. It seems to me incongruous to imagine that such values for the nation -- or such needs of a party -- can be intelligently served by personal combat between two Presidential aspirants in the narrow arena of one primary contest. Quite the contrary seems obvious. Far from enlightening the nation or strengthening the party, such a conflict would almost certainly prove distorted and abrasive. It would confuse issues and individuals, convictions and ambitions. It would be a dividing race between political personalities, not a healing race toward national purpose.

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Fourth. I am profoundly committed to my responsibilities as Governor under the renewed proof of confidence given me by the voters of New York little more than a year ago. For the coming crucial weeks of the State Legislature, the meeting of my responsibilities could only be impaired by active campaigning for higher office. In less critical times, I might have tried -- as indeed I have tried in earlier years -- to undertake both endeavors. But I now cannot ignore either the times I see or the responsibilities I have. This is not to argue that the problems of the state are more commanding than those of the nation. But in very great measure, the problems of New York are the problems of America -- schools and slums, health and taxes, law and justice.

And -- finally -- as to my future political course...

I have said that I stood ready to answer to any true and meaningful call from the Republican Party to serve it and the nation. I still so stand. I would be derelict or uncandid, were I to say otherwise.

I expect no such call. And I shall do nothing in the future, by word or by deed, to encourage such a call.

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We live in an age when the word of a political leader seems to invite instant and general suspicion. I ask to be spared any measure of such distrust. I mean -- and I shall abide by -- precisely what I say.

As to practical steps....

I have signed the appropriate affidavit asking the withdrawal of my name from the Oregon primary. The terms of this affidavit are precise. They plainly declare that I am not and will not be a candidate for the Presidency.

I have instructed my staff and associates to respect my decision in all ways.

I have sent telegrams to this clear effect to all groups of volunteers, who have been so generous on my behalf.

As to my personal plans....

I shall, in the months ahead, make known -- in quiet party councils and in occasional public forums -- my own positions on major national and international issues. This must include, of course, the ordeal of Vietnam and the quest for peace.

I must, in all good conscience, do this. I must do it as a citizen, as a governor, and as the head of the Policy Committee of the Republican Governors Conference.

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I shall not, however, be speaking as a candidate.  
And I shall not be speaking against any candidate.

I shall be striving to help my party -- and its  
Presidential nominee -- to define the great issues with  
clarity and to face them with courage.

It is my complete conviction that this is the  
truest service I now can give to my party and my country.